



## YOUR GUIDE TO Foster Parenting in Massachusetts

**t**he Department of Children and Families (DCF) is the state agency charged with the responsibility of protecting children from abuse and/or neglect. DCF's goal is to keep children at home and to support families so that everyone is safe and healthy. However, if a child is in immediate danger DCF has the authority to remove him or her from their home.

### Why do children need foster care?

The Department of Children and Families Foster Care Program provides safe homes and compassionate foster parents for children who are removed from their homes due to abuse and/or neglect, unsafe or dangerous conditions. A child might be removed if he or she has been sexually assaulted, seriously physically abused or severely neglected by someone in the home. DCF must seek court approval for the removal if a child must be removed from home to be protected.

Whenever the Department removes children from their home, attempts to identify family or extended family members are conducted for placement. If the Department is unsuccessful in its attempt to place a child with extended family, foster care is the alternative that offers the child a caring and stable home. The safety of a foster home can often be the place where children begin to heal from the trauma they have experienced.

### Who are the children awaiting foster care?

The Massachusetts Department of Children and Families has children of all ages in foster care, from infants to older adolescents and from all ethnic and economic backgrounds. Foster parents are especially needed for:

- Older children and teenagers.
- Children with special needs. These special needs may be developmental, educational and/or emotional.
- Medically involved children.
- Drug-affected infants.
- Sibling groups.
- Linguistic and ethnic minorities.

Foster parents are needed for African American, Latino and Asian children and for children who speak Spanish, Portuguese, Laotian, Vietnamese or Cambodian.

### How long do children stay in foster care?

The average stay is somewhere between three to eighteen months.

DCF feels very strongly that children should be with their parents whenever possible and works very hard to make the family home safe, and then to return the child as soon as possible to their own home. When this isn't possible, the Department works to find an alternative, permanent family for the children.

### Is there any contact with the child's parents?

Yes. Children need to remain in touch with their families, since the goal in most cases is for the child to return home.

It is important for the foster parents to work with the child's parents with the support of Department staff.

However, your involvement with the child's family is determined on an individual case by case basis.





### Can I decide the age or gender of the child I foster?

Yes. As part of the licensing process, you and your social worker will decide together which children placed in your home would be the best match for your family.

### What are the requirements?

- In Massachusetts, you need to be at least 18 years of age to become a foster parent.
- You may be single, married, partnered, divorced or widowed to become a foster parent.
- You may have up to six children residing in your home at any given time. This includes birth children, adopted children, foster children, relatives' children, or day care children.
- You may either rent or own your own home. However, the living and sleeping quarters must be large enough to provide adequate space, privacy and safety for all household members, as well as comply with other state regulations.
- Your family must have a stable source of income to be able to adequately support all your current household members.
- You can be at home or work.
- Your home needs to meet safety requirements and standards.
- DCF will complete a background record check as part of the licensing process. This background record check includes fingerprinting the applicant caretaker.

### What is involved in the training to become a foster parent?

The training for foster parents is called "MAPP"—Massachusetts Approach to Partnership in Parenting.

The training is designed to help families understand the difficulties children in foster care face. It also helps families understand how foster parenting will affect your family.

MAPP training offers skills in a number of different areas such as communication, positive discipline and the building of self-esteem.

The training includes in-home interviews that allow the social worker to gather family information and get to know you and your family.

Once the training is successfully completed and the interviewing is over, the decision is made to approve you as a licensed foster parent.

### What are some of the most important qualities for being a foster parent?

The Massachusetts Department of Children and Families is looking for people who feel ready to face the challenge of parenting.

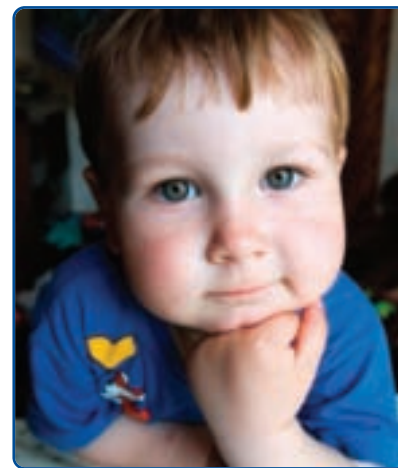
You need to be a good communicator and problem solver; you must be able to express, accept and understand feelings — both yours and the child's. You need to have the ability to support the physical and emotional needs of a child in crisis. Having a sense of humor will also be helpful to you as a foster parent.

### What about medical insurance and other expenses for foster children?

As a foster parent, you are reimbursed for taking a child into your home. This includes a stipend for daily expenses, a quarterly clothing allowance and coverage of the child's medical expenses.

### What support services are available to foster parents?

You will be assigned a foster care social worker. There will also be a social worker assigned to each child placed in your home. There are also other supportive services available to assist you that your foster care social worker will discuss with you. This includes an after hours, toll free "Helpline".



### DCF AREA OFFICE DIRECTORY



For more information please contact the DCF Area Office in your area, or call toll free: **1-800-KIDS-508**.

#### WEST

- ★ Pittsfield 413-236-1800
- ★ Greenfield 413-775-5000
- ★ Holyoke 413-493-2600
- ★ Van Wart Center E. Springfield 413-205-0500
- ★ Springfield 413-452-3200

#### CENTRAL

- ★ Leominster 978-353-3600
- ★ Whitinsville 508-929-1000
- ★ Worcester, East & West 508-929-2000

#### NORTHEAST

- ★ Lowell 978-275-6800
- ★ Lawrence 978-557-2500
- ★ Haverhill 978-469-8800
- ★ Cape Ann, Salem 978-825-3800
- ★ Lynn 781-477-1600

#### METRO

- ★ Malden 781-388-7100
- ★ Framingham 508-424-0100
- ★ Cambridge/Somerville 617-520-8700
- ★ Arlington 781-641-8500
- ★ Coastal/S. Weymouth 781-682-0800

#### SOUTHEAST

- ★ Taunton/Attleboro 508-821-7000
- ★ Brockton 508-894-3700
- ★ Fall River 508-235-9800
- ★ New Bedford 508-910-1000
- ★ Cape Cod & Islands 508-760-0200
- ★ Plymouth 508-732-6200

#### BOSTON

- ★ Hyde Park 617-363-5000
- ★ Dimock St., Roxbury 617-989-2800
- ★ Park St., Dorchester 617-822-4700
- ★ Chelsea 617-660-3400